N E W S L E T T E R

F O R B I R D W A T C H E R S

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Our Contributors

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Stone Curlew

We saw 3 stone curlews (Burhinus oedicnemus) on one of the islets of Adyar estuary from the campus of the society on 28.4.79. We did not see it later and we do not know whether the bird is a migrant or resident. My friend had seen this bird last year around the same date.

Insect Control by Birds (Continued from December NLBW Vol.XIX No.12) by Indra Kumar Sharma

Green bee-eaters, house swifts and swallows consume flying insects in the air over growing crops. Bulbuls and house sparrows hunt insects on plants, and mynas, shrikes, drongos and partridges hunt insects and their larvae on the ground. Drongos of course also catch insects in the air.

When the soil is ploughed, grubs, maggots, and cocoons of pest insects are exposed and various species of birds feed on them. Some birds follow the tractor and pounce on the insects when they emerge. Among such birds are egrets, house crows, jungle crows, and mynas. The hoopoe and the Indian roller feed on insects and their larvae from the ground.

It would therefore be desirable to attract different species of birds to agricultural fields for pest control. This should be done by planting bushes of Zizyphus and Capparis and other suitable varieties. Ficus trees too may be useful for attracting mynas and bulbuls. Crevices in the walls of the farm houses attract birds like mynas for breeding.

It has been noted that occasionally there were serious epidemics of Amsata and Athalia on mangoes and mustard crops and the crops were completely destroyed by these pests. However the damage was negligible where there were large numbers of insectivorous birds.

Birding at Vemulapalli Tank by S. Ashok Kumar

While cruising along Nalgonda-Miryalguda road around 10 a.m. on 19th Decembe last year, a vast year of water - it's ripples washing the foot of a hillock suddenly came into view. Parking my Car on the roadside, I made my way to the water-front through the fallow fields equipped with Zenith Binoculars and Dr. Salim Ali's "Book of Indian Birds". Near the margin of the tank I spotted 7 whitebreasted waterhens. Some distance away on the projection of a submerged rock there were 6 cormorants and 3 little egrets. One cormorant was drying its wings in typical manner for almost 10 minutes. After a while I saw a creature crawling on to a rock and I saw that it was a tortoise and later I found two more tortoises in the company of the cormorants. The elongated and raised heads of the tortoises looked very much like the head of a cobra. 50 yards away from the rock I found three more tortoises surfacing and their brown backs reflected the bright rays of the sun. In this area I found 14 cormorants.

On the other side of the tank I noticed flocks of teals clucking in a peculiar manner and flying from one area of the tank to another. Their flight presented a magnificent picture. Close to the water front there was a party of little ringed plovers running and stopping as they are wont to do to pick tit bits in the grass. I watched this scene for nearly three hours.

A week later I went to the same spot and found hundreds of teals in flight presenting again a very spectacular picture against the background of a turquoise blue sky.

Birds getting scarce by Ananta Mitra

I have been keeping a watch on the depleting bird population of birds around Calcutta and I would like to make some comment on a few species.

1. White collared green kingfisher (Halcyon chloris): On the west of the city on the banks of the ganges is the Indian Botanical Garden founded in 1782. Its area is 273 acres and consists of a magnificent variety of trees. There are a number of swampy areas covered with aquatic vegetation.

On 17-4-76 Shri. P.K. Sen Gupta and myself saw these white collared green kingfishers in this garden. In West Bengal this bird has been recorded from the Sundarbans as well as in the Botanical Garden. It was my first encounter with the bird and it drew my attention to itself by its sharp call - Chrink, Chrink, Chrink .... Krinchu, Krinchu, Krinchu..... We were able to locate three birds. 2 of them were obviously a pair and were carrying food for their nestlings in a nest hole about 30 feet from the ground in the trunk of an old casuarina tree. 2 weeks later on 1.5.76 we revisited the site. The nesting period was over and we discovered only one bird in a bushy tree on the bank of the swamp. Next year again on 25.6.77 we spotted the bird in the same patch of garden.

We have not been able to see this bird from 1977 to 79 and perhaps the birds have become locally extinct.

2. Forest Wagtail (Motacilla indica): In spite of the accelerating denudation in Calcutta there are some big orchards at Khodar Bazar about 30 km. to the south of the city. In a lichi grove (Nephelium litchi) we came across a forest wagtail on 16.10.76. Since forest wagtails are not commonly seen in south Bengal we were quite fascinated with this discovery. The sideways movement of the tail clearly revealed that identity. Next year on 12.3.77 we once again came upon the bird in the neighbouring area of Bishayluxmi Tola. It was a solitary bird eating insects from the ground. Thereafter up to 1979 our search for this species in the same locality has proved futile.

3. Burmese Plaintive Cuckoo (Cacomantis merulinus querulus): In the salt lake area east of Calcutta covering a space of 80 sq.km. 246 species of

On 8th February, coming back from Jasdan we saw an incredible collection of Demoiselle Cranes on the Aji Reservoir south of Rajkot. At a conservative estimate, more than 5,000 cranes were settled along the water's edge. What a thrilling sight they made as they flew against the orange glow of the setting sun? This winter they are more scattered as the heavy monsoon rains have filled all the reservoirs providing them innumerable roosting and drinking places. Even so, they are so plentiful that we often have them flying over the city at night and every one looks up to see the skiens flighting low across and dark sky, their underparts lighted up phantom-wise by the glow of the city lights.

Behaviour of Birds at Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary during Eclipse by ZF

Dr. Gift Siromoney, Head of the Department of Statistics, Madras Christian College, Tambaram, Madras, reports that he went to Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary to observe the reaction of the birds during the eclipose. During the peak period 89% of the sun's disc was covered at Madras. Vedanthangal is 80 km by road from Madras in a south westerly direction. Dr. Siromoney reports that "There was no change in behaviour of birds either in feeding, roosting, nest-building or other activities". This contradicts the findings of observers who were present in areas of total eclipse. In such areas there was apparently considerable roosting activity when there was darkness at noon.

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